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Morphological notes on the Old Chinese counterfactual*

Wolfgang Behr

The claim that Chinese had neither unambiguous, nor obligatory syntactic or morphological markers of counterfactuality, which has loomed large with philosophers of language, sinologists, and cognitive psychologists during the better part of the 20th century, is reviewed here from a diachronic and typological perspective, focussing on Old Chinese (OC). In contradistinction from the cross-linguistically widespread use of past-tense morphology or, less commonly, of dissociative spatial markers, the predominant strategy to mark counterfactuals in OC was ‘direct’ assertion in the protasis. It made use of a non-indicative copula marked for stativity by prefixation, which acts as a complementizer *vis-à-vis* the dependent clause. Morphological analysis, building upon advances in the reconstruction of OC phonology in Jacques (2000), suggests that OC combined this non-indicative copula with a causative morpheme (*s-) to encode concessives and with an existential negative (*ma-) to express a non-facultative negative counterfactual, surfacing as *wēi* 微 (“if it be not that...”). Straightforward “positive” counterfactuality *could* also be expressed through conjunction compounding in late Classical and Medieval Chinese, or by the use of simple superordinate verbs such as *shǐ* 使 or *lìng* 令. Morphologically, these share the property of being derived from the underlying verb base by causative or deontic prefixes, but CF interpretation also depends on the interplay with schetic markers and pragmatic embedding in the remainder of the sentence. Non-obligatory marking of counterfactuals thus emerges as a preference, not as a categorical incapacity, while the choice of ‘direct’ assertion, rather than temporal or distal implicatures to convey it, is unrelated to the richness of morphology in a given language.

1 Introduction

Suppose we could not imagine living a different kind of life, having experiences, thoughts or feelings different from those we have, we once had, or might have had under certain preconditions; suppose we could not think of a blue banana, of an eight-legged dog, or speculate what the role of China in world history would have been if Europe had been completely depopulated by the bubonic plague in the 14th cent. A.D.¹ The ability to reason about questions of this type, i.e., to entertain hypothetical, conditional and, indeed, counterfactual (CF) propositions,² is a capacity

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¹ *Blue banana* being, incidentally, the name of at least an internationally registered design label, of a shopping emporium in Dubai and of a US software company, the *eight-legged dog* a robotic vehicle of the South Korean army, and the bubonic plague scenario the starting point of Kim Stanley Robinson’s novel *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002).

² The relationship between the labels *hypothetical*, *irrealis*, and *counterfactual* is notoriously ill-defined in the literature. Here I follow Elliott (2000: 70) in using *irrealis* as a quasi-synonym of

universal in adult human beings, though not necessarily in pre-school children, and very unlikely in non-human primates. The consolidation of CF reasoning capacities, emerging as early as at the age of two with *some* children, seems to be a fairly slow process, which is not even completed upon reaching puberty.³ Its linguistic expression is arguably a semantic primitive (Wierzbicka 1997: 51f.). Since counterfactual reasoning can be selectively impaired under conditions such as schizophrenia (Hooker et al. 2000), Parkinson's disease (McNamara et al. 2003), or various cortical lesions (Gomez-Beldarrain et al. 2005), it is likely that it has – considerable individual variation notwithstanding (Kasimatis/Wells 1995) – at least a “hard-wired” component, deeply rooted in the human brain. Its denial amounts to no less than a denial of such fundamental emotions as regret, guilt, and shame, and, *a fortiori*, of rational, self-reflexive and ethical behaviour, i.e., many of those properties which ground the morality of an individual in an accountable, conscious choice beyond quasi-mechanical responses to certain external stimuli and norms it encounters and which enable it to conceive of alternative worlds. It is therefore all the more surprising that on and off in the history of Western studies on China since its missionary beginnings in the 16th century, this very capacity has been called into question, and – in a characteristic Humboldtian or Whorfian twist⁴ – related to the alleged lack of grammatical means in Classical Chinese, paralleling those which are used to mark CFs in many Indo-European languages.

In sinology this trend has culminated in the widely reviewed claim of Alfred Bloom (1981), that even speakers of Modern Hong Kong Cantonese and Taiwan Mandarin do less well in counterfactual reasoning than their English-speaking counterparts and that this ‘deficiency’ is linguistically determined in so far as Modern Standard Chinese allegedly lacks overt markers of counterfactuality equivalent in function to the English subjunctive. Bloom's deterministic application of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been thoroughly rejected by several authors, criticizing the accuracy and idiomaticity of the Chinese versions of the test stories he used, as well as the test setting,⁵ and several fine works have described the full range of possibilities to mark counterfactuality in Modern Standard Mandarin (Eifring 1988; 1994, chap. 7; Wu 1995; Qiu 2000). Moreover, it has been shown

hypothetical, and in viewing both terms as designations for a very broad category of which *counterfactuals* are but one possible token, along with *potential*, *deontic* and other *fictive* modalities.

³ For good overviews of recent general experimental work in this area see Harris/German/Mills (1996), Riggs/Peterson (2000), German/Nichols (2003) and Beck et al. (2006). For an acquisition perspective on Chinese see Hsu/Tzeng/Hung (2004).

⁴ See, e.g., Granet (1928), Haag (1940), and Lohmann (1948) for some pre-Whorfian specimens of this procedure, Hansen (1985), Bosley (1997), and Nisbett (2003) for some more contemporary repercussions, and cf. Roetz (1993a; 1993b: 15–17; and this volume) for a succinct critique of such positions.

⁵ Cf. Au (1983; 1984a), the rejoinder by Bloom (1984), and surrejoinder by Au (1984b), as well as Fang (1984), Liu (1985) and Pinker (1994: 66f.).

experimentally that in a replication of one of Bloom's test tasks, Arabic-speaking subjects patterned neatly opposite to their English speaking counterparts, despite the fact that Arabic has a fully grammaticalized construction involving combinations of subordinate conjunctions with non-present verbal morphology to mark CF antecedents, much like English and many other Indo-European languages (Lardiere 1992), so that the reasons for this patterning have to be sought extralinguistically.⁶ Since most proponents of Whorfian implications of allegedly absent linguistic categories for the (non-)development of thought, science and history in China base their claims on "the" pre-modern written language, it is regrettable that apart from Harbsmeier's (1981: 272–287; 1991: 116–118) pathbreaking observations, little work has been done so far on the expression of counterfactuality in pre-modern stages or non-standard varieties of Chinese so far.

2 Cross-linguistic typology

Counterfactuality typically occurs in two different sentence types, namely wishes such as "I wish I hadn't gone to that faculty meeting" and conditionals such as "If I hadn't gone to that faculty meeting, then...". These can be further specified for time and/or aspect such that a *present* CF conveys that an antecedent and its consequent do not hold at the present time or the time of utterance, while a *past* CF conveys that it *did* not hold at a particular time in the past removed from the utterance time. If a CF denotes that a consequent will not hold in the future, the result is a "remote possibility", often called *future-less-vivid* (FLV) in the literature (see, e.g., Iatradou 2000).⁷ Essentially, then, a non-truth component of meaning in the antecedent is associated in a CF construction with different relative or absolute times and circumstances in a real or imagined world. The question which has therefore been at the heart of many works in the philosophy of language or theoretical semantics is whether the counterfactual force of meaning in such constructions arises from presupposition, assertion or implicature, and to which extent pragmatic "noise" is involved in the truth-evaluation mechanism.

In Indo-European languages it is not possible to reconstruct a universally shared verbal morphology marking counterfactuality in the parent language.⁸ Table 1

⁶ See, however, recent experiments by Yeh/Gentner (2005), who continue to argue for a soft Whorfian stance, implying that Chinese speakers may still be disadvantaged, if only in *some* cases, since detection of CFs not readily identifiable by recourse to world knowledge requires *more* contextual processing than in the grammatically signalled English parallels.

⁷ Or, occasionally, *future-non-vivid*. The term FLV apparently originates in classical philology, the earliest reference I have been able to locate being Greenough (1896: 13).

⁸ For a diachronic overview of pathways to categories yielding CF interpretation in Indo-European see Auvera/Sxallej (2004). Characteristically, the lack of a shared PIE irrealis category has not led to a denial of this capacity with speakers of Indo-European languages!

shows some of the dominant strategies found in various older Indo-European languages (cf. Krisch 1986).

	Protasis	Apodosis	language
Past	OPT. PRET.	OPT. PRET.	Gothic
	CONJ. IMPF.	CONJ. IMPF.	Latin
	OPT. PERF.	OPT. PERF.	Avestan
	SUBJ. PRES.	COND.	Old Irish
	COND. >> OPT. PRES.	COND. >> OPT. PRES.	Vedic
	PRET. + PART	PRET. + PART	Hittite
	! INJ.	INJ.	Homeric Greek (partly)
Present	OPT. PRET.	OPT. PRET.	Gothic
	CONJ. IMPF.	CONJ. IMPF.	Latin
	! IND. PRES.	IND. PRES.	Avestan
	SUBJ. PRET.	SUBJ. PRET.	Old Irish
	CONJ.	CONJ.	Lithuanian
	OPT. PRES.	OPT. PRES.	Vedic
	PRET. + PART	PRET. + PART	Hittite
	! INJ.	INJ.	Homeric Greek (partly)

Table 1: CF marking strategies in Indo-European

It can be readily observed that apart from the use of specialized moods (optative, subjunctive etc.) signalling a CF conditioning, or of analytic constructions which make use of various specialized conjunctions and particles not further detailed here, the dominant strategy employed is to put one or both of the clauses into a past tense. Crucially, past tense markers often occur in the antecedent (or “protasis”) irrespective of the question whether what is expressed in the consequent (or “apodosis”) is a past or a present CF. This strategy is also very common outside Indo-European, such that, for instance, Japanese, Korean, Papago, Navajo, Cree, Yoruba, Uto-Aztecan, Hebrew, Turkish, Basque and Arabic all feature one or more possibilities to use past tense morphology in this function (cf. James 1982; Comrie 1986; Fleischman 1989; Wierzbicka 1997; Iatradou 2000; Smith/Perkins/Fernald 2003; Plungian 2004; Han 2006). The same is even true of a number of creole languages with radically reduced tense/aspect systems (Winford 2000: 108–114). Put another way, in all these languages the antecedent is signalled to be unreal by *fake* past morphology, usually, but not necessarily, along with a mood category

(Bybee 1992: 516; Dahl 1997: 100; Lazard 1998). Some Indo-European languages, however, occasionally resort to simple indicatives or injunctives in the protasis (noted by an exclamation mark in Table 1), the latter being the default Indo-European verbal category used to express actions and events which are *neutral* with respect to the relationship between utterance time and topic time (Hoffman 1967). Consider for instance the following two examples from Later Vedic (1) with concomitant mood marking, and from Avestan (2):⁹

- (1) Later Vedic (ŚB 5.5.4.8; Kiparsky 2005: 10)

yad evaṃ nā vakṣyo mūrdhā te vy àpatiṣyat

CONJ SO NEG-speak-INJ:2SG head POSS:2SG open burst-COND:3SG

If you had not said that, your head would have exploded.

- (2) Avestan (Yt. 6.3; Krisch 1986: 11)

yeiði zī huuarə nōit uzuxšīēiti, aða daēuua vispyā mərənciṇti yā hənti

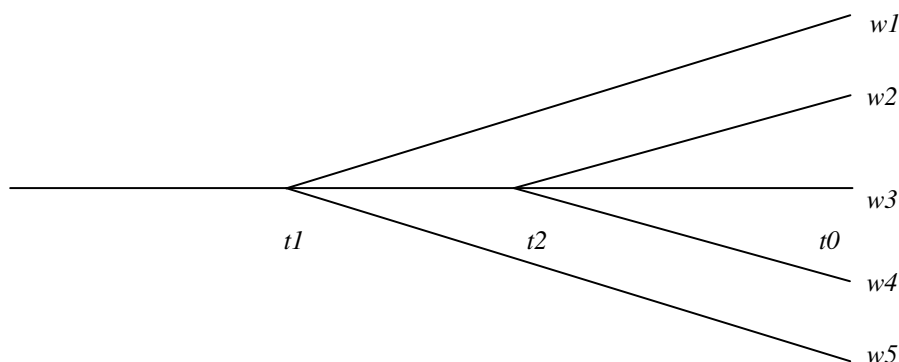
həptō-karšuuōhuua.

CONJ PART-ENCL sun NEG rise-IND:3SG, then demon-PL all kill-IND:3PL REL be-IND:3PL world-LOC

Now, if the sun did not rise, then the demons would kill all those who are in the seven worlds.

Surprisingly, this type of bleaching of temporal reference along with the increase of what one might call hypothetical *intensity* is cross-linguistically well known and reaches extreme forms for instance in contemporary Russian (Comrie 1986: 93–96). “Backshifting” of time, i.e. the transfer of an ideal or imagined condition to the past, suggesting, as it were, metonymically that the condition is not the actual state of affairs and has therefore no truth value (yet), is often explained by semantists with reference to a forward-branching time/world model (see Nishiguchi 2004):

- (3)



(TxW-frame model; $t1 \prec t2 \prec t0$; $t0$ is the utterance time)

⁹ Cf. Tichy (2006: 75), who adduces further examples of this occasional, i.e., incompletely grammaticalized, usage of the present in Indo-European.

If the actual world of the speaker is w_3 at t_0 , then counterfactuality amounts to the interpretation that a certain proposition is believed by the speaker (*and*, under normal circumstances, the addressee) to be false with respect to this actual world, but true with respect to some other alternatively possible, branched-off world that is *not* w_3 . To express that proposition, the speaker shifts his perspective to t_2 , i.e., back in time and virtually “corrects” the path leading to, say, w_2 . A model like this, apart from being translatable into more formal semantic calculi, has the distinct advantage of explaining not only the fake use of past tense and different relative depths of past tenses, but at the same time the use of subjunctive morphology after propositional attitude predicates such as “to believe”, “to hold that”, “to be glad that” etc. Through predicates carrying this force, the world, as a speaker observes or believes it to be, is implicitly compared to an alternative world, which he holds to have particular properties if the proposition complementing the attitude predicate were untrue or “less” true. In models of this type, then, languages employ past tense marking as a semantic *exclusion marker* (Iatradou 2001), conveying by *implicature* that just as the topic time excludes the time of utterance, the topic world(s) exclude(s) the actual world. Conversely, usage of the present tense or explicit non-tense (as in the case of the Indo-European injunctives) for an event which does not take place at the utterance time would rely upon a strategy whereby the degree to which the event is implied is weakened through temporal ‘dissociation’.

Another conceptually related CF construction, which is encountered slightly less commonly, denotes the semantic remoteness of the protasis event through spatial rather than temporal dissociation (Nevins 2002). Such ‘distal’ CF marking is seen, for instance, in Old and Classical Tibetan:

- (4) *slob.dpon lags | las 'di las ni sems.can.kun rten.no |*
teacher.master HON; action DPR action them creature:PL adhere(PRS PERF)-F

'di.la ma.rten.na
this-D/L adhere (NG2-ST.PRS=PA!-LOC=CD)

slob.dpon nyid.kyang ga.nas 'krungs |
teacher.master self.also where HON-be.born(PRS PERF)

Oh master, as for this kind of acting, all creatures adhere/would have adhered [to it]. If [they] had not adhered to this [acting], where would the master have been born from? (example from Zeisler 2004: 420)

- (5) *lha | dgra.bcom.pa.dag ma mchis.na |*
majesty slayer.enemy.DET.PL-HON NEG be.there.LOC=CD

dgra.bcom.pa.dag bkum.pa mchis re.skan |
slayer.enemy.DET.PL-HON kill.PF.DET be.there by.no.means

‘Your majesty, if *arhants* did not exist, how could there possibly be the killing of *arhants*?!’¹⁰

The postposition *na* is used to specify that the locus participant to which it is attached constitutes “... an ENCLOSED SPACE in ... which the event occurs” (Beyer 1992: 268) and, by extension, denotes ‘remoteness’. In perfect analogy to the temporal CF markers, *na* may also occur in hypothetical wishes:

- (6) *nga rig.pa.dang ldan-na ci ma-rung.*
 1PPR learned.COM be.provided.with.LOC IPR NEG-be.fit
 “Would that I were wise!” (Beyer 1992: 383)

While the spatial dissociation is thus still synchronically retrievable in Tibetan, it may well have merged into other grammatical subsystems, *viz.*, deictic or positional classifiers¹¹, allative case endings¹², or directive “particles”, as in the case of Colloquial Burmese *khè*, which is historically derived from an auxiliary locative verb ‘(be) back there’ *khà* (Okell 1969, I: 33; II: 277).

- (7) *to khé yin chànθa hma phè*
 clever DIR if=CD rich IRREALIS-EMPH
 If he were smart, he would be rich. (Nichols 2004: 28)¹³

However untransparent synchronically, all of these elements revolve around a semantic prototype referring to the dissociation of the speaker from an event.

3 CFs in Old Chinese: history

Given this background, the question naturally arises, how counterfactuality is expressed in languages which do not or cannot shift tense or location for this purpose (cf. Nevins 2001 on Modern Chinese). How does one signal the mechanism which evaluates whether a proposition in a set of possible worlds, which are more or less shared by the speaker/listener or writer/reader, and are just like the actual world, differs with respect to its truth component, without using the basic temporal distancing metaphor first described by Fleischman (1989)?¹⁴

¹⁰ The example, quoted here from Simon (1967: 126), is from the Tibetan *Divyāvadāna* (572, 1.13), translating Sanskrit *deva na santi arhantaḥ kuto 'rhadvadhaḥ*.

¹¹ For examples from Guyakuruan languages see Vidal/Manelis Klein (1998).

¹² For examples from Lake Miwok see Callaghan (1998).

¹³ For further Burmese examples see Okell (1969, II: 77), Nichols (2004), and Nevins (2002: 442).

¹⁴ Obviously, this is not the only way of analyzing CFs. It fails, e.g., to capture *probabilistic* CFs of the form “if *p* had been the case it would have been probable to degree *ω* that *q*”. For a harsh

Early Old Chinese (OC) of the oracle bone period did not employ conditional markers within the antecedent. Zhào Chéng's (1985: 292f.) claim that *ruò* 若 (OC *na-k¹⁵) already functioned as a conditional conjunction in the protasis on the strength of the single OBI example quoted in (8) has been thoroughly refuted by Zhāng Yùjīn (1994: 183f.). Zhāng shows that *ruò*, which always collocates with the demonstrative *zī* 茲 in oracle bone inscriptions unless it is used as a verb referring to 'divine approval' (i.e., *nuò* 諾 < OC *nna-k), can occur in post-subject as well as post-predicate ("complement") positions as the head of a VP with a pronominal object, and that the collocation simply denotes degree comparisons. The conditional force of (8), if any, is therefore merely pragmatically motivated:

- (8) 壬寅卜，方賓貞：若茲不雨，帝隹惟茲邑龍。不若。二月。
(Yǐ 620=Héjǐ 94 r.¹⁶)

Crack-making on a *rén-yín* day [39], Bin tested: [If] it does not rain *like this*, will God-on-high be wrecking this metropolis? Not approved. Second moon.

Thus, if conditionals are overtly signalled in OBI at all, the markers occur sentence-initially or subject-enclitic within the consequent phrase, as in (9)–(11), and their conditional meaning is more often than not hard to distinguish from mere causal or consecutive readings:¹⁷

- (9) 重辛巳酉，此土有大雨。(Héjǐ 41413)

[If] it should be on a *xīnsì* day [18] that we practice a *yǒu* (chopping) sacrifice, will we *then* have abundant rain?

- (10) a. 三豚，此雨。 b. 重犬一，此雨。 (Héjǐ 31191)
c. 二犬，此雨。 d. 三犬，此雨。

- a. [If we sacrifice] three piglets, will it *then* be raining?
b. [If] it should be one dog that [we sacrifice], will it *then* be raining?
c. [If we sacrifice] two dogs, will it *then* be raining?

critique of possible-worlds approaches towards counterfactuality and an alternative 'connexive' algorithmic theory see Barker (1999).

¹⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all asterisked reconstructions represent Old Chinese (OC) and follow Sagart's (1999) revision of Baxter's (1992a) system, adding some notational conveniences, justified in Gassmann/Behr (2005, III, 10: 424f.).

¹⁶ Abbreviations of inscription corpora transcribe the system commonly used in the PRC into *Pīnyīn*. If traceable, the *Héjǐ* 合集 number is given for oracle bone inscriptions, the *Jíchéng* 集成 number for bronzes.

¹⁷ For more examples and a discussion cf. Zhāng (1994: 23f., 66–68; 2001: 92f., 245f., 347f.; 2003: 386–394, 428–430, App. IV). *Cǐ* is limited to periods III–IV, while *dàn* occurs throughout all inscriptional periods and diviner groups.

- d. [If we sacrifice] three dogs, will it *then* be raining?”

(11) a. 重澹濕田畝响, 𠂔受年。大吉 (Tūnnán 715)

b. 重上田畝响, 𠂔受年。

a. [If] it should be in the swamp fields that we cultivate, will we *then* receive a good harvest? Greatly reliable.

b. [If] it should be in the highland fields that we cultivate, will we *then* receive a good harvest?

𠂔, a graphic predecessor of *yán* 延 (*lan), is commonly read as *dàn* by paleographers, to signal its functional equivalence to the consecutive conjunction *dàn* 誕 (*llan-q) in the edited literature,¹⁸ of which it is a prosodic (“type A”) variant, adding the *-q suffix encountered with non-enclitics in the pronominal system.¹⁹ There is one further word, which has traditionally been claimed to function as a conditional conjunction during period-I OBI, if (and only if) interpreted in the following sense:

(12) c. □□〔卜〕□〔貞〕：我其已祀方賓，𠂔作帝降若。

d. □□卜□〔貞〕：我勿已祀方賓，𠂔作帝降不若。 (Héjǐ 6497)

c. (Crack-making) {on a day X, Y} (tested): [If] we perform a ritual in Bīn, will the lord on high *then* send down approval?

d. Crack-making {on a day X, Y} (tested): [If] we do not perform a ritual in Bīn, will the lord on high *then* send down non-approval?

Here, *zuò* 作 (*ttsak), written with the bare phonophoric as *zhà* 乍 (*N-ttsrak) throughout the OBI period, has been taken to be a predecessor of the later *zé* 則 (*ttsək) in bronze inscriptions (BI) and the edited literature.²⁰ Absent any coherent theory of OC ‘particle’ ablaut, the suggested etymonic proximity remains conjectural at best. It could just as well reflect dialectal or sociolinguistic influences, or, indeed, chance. A recent study by Takashima (2006) has carefully demonstrated several other problems which arise with a conjunctive interpretation. He has argued instead that *zuò* is an early preverbal causative operator, diachronically preceding the later common causative *shǐ* 使, which was still ungrammaticalized in this

¹⁸ See for a selection of examples Yáng (1987, 2: 11, s.v. *yǔshǒu zhùcí* 語首助詞), for a less convincing analysis as a modal adverb Hé et al. (1985: 92f.).

¹⁹ See Gassmann/Behr (2005, III: 335f., 444).

²⁰ The theory apparently originates with Hú Guāngwěi’s 胡光偉 *Jiǎgǔwén lì* 甲骨文例 (Ms., Yú Yǒngliáng 余永梁 ed. [1928]: *Zhōngshān Dàxué Yǔyán Lìshǐ Yánjiūsuǒ kǎogǔ cóngshū* 中山大學語言歷史研究所考古叢書. Guāngzhōu [non *vidi*]; cf. Takashima 2006), but its popularity in later works is certainly due to Guō (1965: 76). *Zé* only occurs as a conjunction since the late Western Zhōu period in BI elsewhere, an observation which is used by Táng (2002) as a counter-argument against a conjunctive reading of *zuò*.

function during the OBI period, and that the proper reading of example (12) implies a deleted deep structure ‘pivot’ NP *dì* 帝. This results in a translation of the “charge” (*mìngcí* 命辭) as “We should perform the sacrificial ritual at Bīn, [and that] will make [God-on-high] send down approval”, such that the causality is again merely contextually motivated. Thus, while OBI had several readily available means to mark conditionals beyond simple conversational implicature (i.e., what is traditionally referred to as *yìhéfǎ* 意合法), to the best of my knowledge no unambiguous example of a CF conditional has been uncovered in the corpus so far. This is hardly surprising, however, since the pragmatic setting of divinatory texts, reflecting questions and charges to the ancestral spirits, would hardly be conducive for propositions of a type nonchalantly implying epistemic misgivings towards the spirits.²¹

In Western Zhōu BI the set of conjunctions introducing consecutive, causal and conditional consequent clauses grew considerably to include at least *nǎi* 迺~乃 (*nnə-ŋ), *zé* 則~則 (*ttsək), *zhà* 乍 (*N-ttsrak), *zuò* 作 (*ttsak), *sì* 肆~肆 (*hlət-s), *yòng* 用 (*loŋ-s), *yǒu* 迺 (*lu), and *gǔ* 古 (*kka) ~ *gù* 故 (*kka-s)²². It is also during this period that three conditional conjunctions – *nǎi* 迺~乃, *jué* 畢~厥 (*kot), and *yǒu*~*yòu* 有~又 (*wə-q~-s) – move to phrase-initial or subject-enclitic positions within the antecedent clause for the first time, as in (13)–(16), cf. (Fāng Lì 1985: 230–238):

- (13) 令眾奮！**乃**克至，余其捨女汝臣十家。(LìNGDǐNG 令鼎; *Jíchéng* 5.2803)

Lìng and Fèn! *If* you manage to reach this, I will grant you ten retainer families.

- (14) 我**乃**至于淮，小大邦亡敢不口具逆王令。

(JŪFÙ XŪGÀI 駒父盥盥; *Jíchéng* 9.4464).

If we will reach the Huái-river (region), there will be none among the small and big statelets daring not to ... and they will all meet the royal charges.

- (15) 有爽實余，有散氏心賊，則則爰鍤千罰千（.....）余**又**爽繇繇，爰鍤千罰千。(Sǎnshì Pán 散氏盤; *Jíchéng* 16.10176)

²¹ In fact, the controllability of the God-on-high, implied by the causative-factitive reading of *zuò* by Takashima (2006) and the associated *m-negatives, are also difficult to reconcile with this ‘sacrolinguistic’ setting.

²² Both sentence types cannot always be strictly separated. See for pertinent examples Guǎn (1981: 166f.), Fāng (1985: 205–220) and Chén (1986: 311f., 319f.). Several of the sentence-initial and mid-sentence particles (*zhùcí* 助詞) classified as “meaningless” by Fāng (1985: 275–361) might in fact turn out to mark modality or particular clause combinations.

If ever (I) should distort facts or *if ever* I should fault the heart of my lord Sǎn, *then* let me be punished a thousandfold by a thousand *huan*.²³ (...) *If ever* I should distort or derange [the oath], *then* let me be punished a thousandfold by a thousand *huan*.

- (16) 𠄎𠄎非正命，迺敢疾𠄎訊人，𠄎則唯輔天降喪。
(²RANXŪ 𠄎𠄎; *Jíchéng* 9.4469)

If it is not the correct mandate and you thereupon dare to interrogate under torture, *then* you will be helping heaven to send down annihilation.

As Lau (1999: 341) pointed out, the conjunction written indiscriminately with or without a determiner as 有 or 又 in (15) is clearly related to the later distributive usage of the indefinite pronoun *huò* 或 (*wə-k).²⁴ Conjunctional *jué* 𠄎 collocates exclusively with *fēi* 非 in the BI, so it is hard to judge whether the conditional force is located in the negative copula (on which more below) or in what looks superficially like the archaic third person pronoun *jué*.²⁵ As in OBI, there is not a single robust example of a CF conditional in the bronzes, although contexts such as land disputes or investiture dialogues would have provided for a considerably likelier pragmatic setting for their occurrence.

In Classical Chinese ‘soft texts’²⁶, we come across an astonishingly wide array of simple (a) and compound (b) conjunctions signalling conditional clauses in sentence-initial or subject-enclitic position.²⁷ These include:

²³ This line is part of an archaic oath-taking formula. In later literature, death or castration penalties are said to be convertible into monetary fines of 600 or 1000 *huan*. For an excellent interpretation of the inscription and its context see Lau (1999: 148f.; 334–345).

²⁴ See on this connection Yàn/Yùchí (1985: 24), Gassmann/Behr (2005, III: 336). Wèi (2000: 219) dates the origin of this conditional *huò* to the late Warring States period, Guǎn (1994: 365) lists two examples from the *Zuǒzhuan* (Xiāng 30, Zhāo 9). If example (15) is interpreted correctly, this usage would have been preceded by at least half a millenium, since the Sǎnshì Pán 散氏盤 is conventionally dated to the reign of King Lì 厲 (c. 857/53–842/28).

²⁵ Neither Chén (1986) nor Pān (2005: 142–166) in the most recent overview of conjunctions in bronze inscriptions would seem to recognize this usage.

²⁶ I use this term loosely for the language represented in edited texts before the end of tonogenesis and the final loss of productive derivational morphology in the non-peripheral dialects, i.e., roughly the period between the 5th cent. B.C. and the 4th cent. A.D.

²⁷ For a near-exhaustive list and pertinent examples see Yáng/Hé (1992: 948–960), who, however, include some post-classical material. For some of the more perceptive studies of subsets of this list see, e.g., Misch (1935), Harbsmeier (1981: 245–287), Hé et al. (1985, s.vv.), Pulleyblank (1995: 150–154), and, above all, Unger (1997: 53–74). The early medieval development in Buddhist sources is sketched in Zēng (2004).

- a. *rú* 如 (*na), *ruò* 若 (*na-k), *guǒ* 果 (*k-lloj-q), *gǒu* 苟 (*kk(r)o-q), *shǐ* 使 (*s-rə-q), *zòng* 縱 (*tsoŋ), *cǎn* 慚 (*s-hllən-q), *shè* 設 (*hlet), *jiè* 借 (*tsak-s), *jiè* 藉~籍 (*N-tsak-s), *jí* 即 (*tsək), *lìng* 令 (*mə-reŋ-s), *wéi* 唯 (*tə-wuj), *jù* 拒 (*ga-q), *dì* 弟 (*lləj-s), *zì* 自 (*dzit), *wéi* 為 (*w(r)aj), *yóu* 猶 (*lu), *suǒ* 所 (*s-kra-q) (...)
- b. *jiǎshǐ* 假使 (*kkra-q.s-rə-q), *jiǎzhī* 假之 (*kkra-q.tə), *ruòshǐ* 若使 (*na-k.s-rə-q), *jiǎruò* 假若 (*kkra-q.na-k), *jièlìng* 藉令 (*N-tsak-s. mə-reŋ-s), *zìfēi* 自非 (*dzit.pə-(tə-wuj), *wéishì* 唯是 (*tə-wuj.de-q), *gǒuhuò* 苟或 (*kk(r)o-q.wwə-k), *jièdìlìng* 藉弟令 (*N-tsak-s.lləj-s.mə-reŋ-s) (...)

Many of these conjunctions *allow* for CF interpretations of the antecedent clauses introduced by them, as, indeed, even many fully unmarked antecedents *may* yield an irrealis interpretation,²⁸ depending on the pragmatic setting of the text. Consider for instance:

- (17) 苟非聖人，莫之能知也。(*Xúnzǐ* 19: 20)

If he was not a saint, he would not be able to know this.

- (18) 死如可逃，何遠之有？(*Zuǒzhuàn*, Zhāo 21, 50: 868)

If death could be escaped, why would I have occasion to eschew it?

- (19) 縱夫子驚祿爵，吾庸敢驚霸王乎？(*Lǚshì Chūnqiū* 15/43: 879)

Suppose I indulged the master's contempt for salary and rank, how then would I dare to indulge in contempt for the position of a lord-protector or king?!

In all of these cases, CF or at least remote possibility interpretations are pragmatically *likely*, but it would be also fairly easy to construct contexts in which the protases *could* be read as mere conditionals. In Misch's Berlin dissertation (1935) it was first pointed out that

(...) im Chinesischen *grundsätzlich* ein Unterschied in der äußeren Form zwischen Realis und Irrealis *nicht* besteht. Die Regel erleidet eine einzige Ausnahme. Wenn der Vordersatz nämlich durch die Partikeln 使, 假 oder 令 eingeleitet wird, haben wir es immer mit einem *Irrealsatz* zu tun (Misch 1935: 10).

This was an important insight, absent from the indigenous Chinese grammatical tradition, which was independently corroborated for *shǐ* by Unger (1997: 66) and Harbsmeier (1981: 273–287). Moreover, Misch already senses, albeit vaguely, that

²⁸ For a collection of examples see Misch (1935: 11–20) and Harbsmeier (1981: 286f.). Note that non-marking of irreal mood in the protasis of CF conditionals is one the six options listed in the cross-linguistic sketch by Lazard (1998: 244f.).

the counterfactual force of these “particles” in Classical Chinese is linked to the fact that they function as causative or deontic matrix verbs, dominating the main verb of the antecedent clause.²⁹

Processually, it seems that truth values are more easily evaluated in contexts where one of the clauses includes negation. Thus non-present double negative CFs of the type “if *p* had not occurred, *q* would not have occurred”, or negative consequent CFs of the form “if *x* were *y*, *z* would not happen” turn out to be the most stable constructions cross-linguistically (Wierzbicka 1997). In the modern Chinese data studied by Eifring (1988; 1994), Qiu (2000) and Nevins (2001), negative CFs therefore provide the most clearcut evidence of context-free, non-pragmatically determined interpretations of a negative truth evaluation of the antecedent. Consequently, protases introduced by *yàobùshì* 要不是, *yàobù~bu* 要不, *rúshì yàobù~bu* 如是要不 etc. are considerably more transparent and unambiguously parsed than those introduced by *rúguǒ* 如果, *jiǎrú* 假如, *jiǎruò* 假若, *yàoshi* 要是 etc., or those ending in ... *dehuà* 的話 in Modern Standard Mandarin. Before we return to the role of morphology in positive CF antecedent markers, let us take a closer look at the negative *wēi* 微, which is “entirely limited to counterfactual usage” (Harbsmeier 1998: 117).³⁰

3.1 Negative CFs with 微 in Old Chinese

Wēi 微, which does not occur as a negative in pre-imperial (O)BI, has been variously treated as a negative (adverb) or a “particle” in Chinese reference works since Liú Qí’s 劉淇 *Zhùzì biànlüè* 助字辨略 (first printed in 1711).³¹ Etymologically, the character, which is only attested once with all its later components in the current OBI corpus (*Héjǐ* 16486: 𡇗, a place name?), emerges as 𡇗 (𡇗), i.e., with the phonophoric 𡇗 (𡇗~𡇗; *mǎj-q) augmented by a *pū* 支 determiner. The fairly rare phonophoric 𡇗 has been argued to have arisen as a side view of *měi* 美 (𡇗~𡇗, *mǎj-q, ‘beautiful’) by paleographers. Its shape is sometimes hard to distin-

²⁹ Misch (1935: 28) writes: “Diese Partikeln, die auch zusammengesetzt in der Form 若使, 假使, 假令, 向使 und 如使 auftreten, sind nicht allzu häufig, aber sehr interessant. Wie oben (...) erwähnt, leiten sie ausschließlich echte Irrealissätze ein – eine Erscheinung, die uns verständlich wird, wenn wir uns die Grundbedeutungen dieser Wörter einmal ansehen. 使 und 令 bedeuten eigentlich ‘veranlassen’, 假 ‘entleihen’. Die Entwicklung dieser Bedeutung zu einem konditionalen Sinn wird klar durch Wendungen wie ‘wenn wir es dazu kommen lassen’, ‘wenn wir einmal als gegeben annehmen’ u.a. Besonders bei 假 liegt auf der Hand, daß diejenigen Sätze, die damit eingeleitet werden, einen ausschließlich irrealen Sinn haben, weil es eigentlich aufzufassen ist als ‘der Vorstellung entleihen’.”

³⁰ Unger (1997) treats this as a conjunction and a ‘quasi-preposition’. For reasons which will become apparent below, I consider it a negative copula.

³¹ Liú (1958: 33f.) already differentiates *fēicí* 非辭 (negative verbal), *bùcí* 不辭 (negative adverbial), *pōcí* 頗辭 (diminutive) and *wúcí* 毋辭 (prohibitive) usages.

guish from *cháng* 長 (𠂔) in OBI, with which it coincides in the depiction of what looks like a prominent human hairstyle or head adornments, whence ‘beautiful’.³² The phonophoric has been analyzed as an acrographemic variant of *qǐ* 豈 (*kkhəj-q) since the *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字. This, however, is rather unlikely, since *qǐ* 豈 is conversely said to contain an acrographemic *wēi* 微 in the same text,³³ and a contact would phonologically necessitate the postulation of a nasal-velar cluster of some kind, which does not fit well into the phonophoric series. It is unclear how the well-known later semantics of *wēi* as ‘subtle, minute’ etc. relate to ‘beautiful’, but the comparison with Tibeto-Burman *mwəy^C (fine, delicate) and congeners (Matisoff 2003: 201), if applicable, makes it likely that they are related metaphorically or indexically, rather than by simple phonetic borrowing.

Wēi always precedes nouns or noun-phrases and commonly, especially during the late classical phase, no VP occurs within the protasis introduced by it. Examples such as (68) with a dependent predicate and an overt ‘pivot’ subject within the protasis, or such as (21), with *wēi* in a subject-enclitic ‘parenthetical’ position, implying a change of person reference, are exceedingly rare, and typically post-classical:

- (20) 是日微樊噲入營譙讓項羽，沛公事幾殆。(Shǐjì 95: 2654)

That day, if it had not been for Fán Kuài entering the camp blaming and making concessions to Xiàng Yǔ, the cause of Duke Pèi would almost have been over.

- (21) 宣王微春居，幾為天下笑矣。(Lǚshì Chūnqīū 20/7: 1405)

King Xuān – if it had not been for Chūnjū – would have almost become the laughingstock of the world.

These observations alone show that *wēi* must have been a negative verb of some kind, the subject of which is usually not expressed. Although *wēi*, which is first attested as a negative in the *Shījīng*, is a fairly low-frequency item among the set of OC negatives, several usages can still be clearly distinguished, which I will review in the following section.³⁴

³² The corresponding ‘intimate’ noun could be *wěi* 尾 (< *məj-q, ‘tail’, ‘to copulate’, cf. English ‘pigtail’, ‘ponytail’ etc). Both characters occur as glosses and phonetic loans for one another (see Jīn 2006: 430).

³³ Compare “微，……从人从支，豈省聲。” (Shuōwén 8A: 164) to “豈，……从豆微省聲。” (5A: 102).

³⁴ Several of the examples in this section are drawn from Sien (1977), Harbsmeier (1981; 1998), and Herforth (1988).

3.1.1 *Wēi* without aspectual marking in the apodosis

Wēi may occur at the beginning of the protasis in sentences, where none of the clauses is marked for aspect or relative temporal reference, e.g.,

- (22) 微子之言，吾不知也。 (*Zuǒzhuàn*, Xiang 31, 40: 164)

If it had not been for You addressing it, I would not know.

- (23) 孔子出，以告顏回曰：「丘之於道也，其猶醯雞與！微夫子之發吾覆也，吾不知天地之大全也。」 (*Zhuāngzǐ* 21: 716)

Master Kǒng went out to report [what had happened] to Yán Huí, saying: “My relationship towards the *dào* is really like that of a bug in the vinegar. *If it had not been for* the master lifting up the lid for me, I would not have known the great integrity of heaven and earth!”

- (24) 趙王齧指出血，曰：「先人失國，微陛下，臣等當蟲出」。
(*Shǐjì* 104: 2775)

The king of Zhào, with blood dripping from his incisors, said: “My ancestors lost our state; *if it had not been for* Your Majesty, I and the likes of me would have been forced to appear as worms [from the corpses].”

3.1.2 *Wēi* with aspectual marking in the apodosis

Quite often, however, the consequent clause of a protasis headed by *wēi* is marked by aspectual particles, yielding explicit past CFs with the sentence-final perfectivity marker *yǐ* 矣 (cf. 25–26), or, more rarely, FLV hypothetical interpretations of the evaluated unreal or remote event with the preverbal future marker *jiāng* 將 (cf. 27):

- (25) 微二子者，楚不國矣。 (*Zuǒzhuàn*, Āi 16, 60: 1043)

If it had not been for you two, Chǔ would not have become a state.

- (26) 微我，晉不戰矣。 (*Guóyǔ* 1.24: 14)

If it had not been for us, Jìn would not have fought.

- (27) 微夫二子之貺財，則丘之道，殆將廢矣。 (*Kǒngzǐ Jiāyǔ* 2/8: 15)

If it was not for the two masters supporting me financially, then my, Hillock’s, way would probably end up having to be abandoned.

3.1.3 *Wēi* with modals/conjunctions in the apodosis

In many cases, the apodosis of a *wēi* protasis is marked by a consecutive conjunction such as *zé* 則 (cf. 28) or *ér* 而 (cf. 29), by modal markers such as *qí* 其 (cf.

30) and *jī* 幾 (cf. 31, 32), by expressive interrogatives such as *hú* 胡 (cf. 33), or pseudo-archaic rhetorical object inversion (cf. 34), thus neatly paralleling the use of specialised conditional or subjunctive moods in such pragmatic settings in Indo-European. Notice that the expression of modality is compatible with aspect marking by *yǐ* 矣 (cf. 35). This last example also presents robust evidence of the understanding of *wēi* as an already archaic negative hypothetical existential VP during the early imperial period, since Wáng Chōng 王充 (27–79) uses *shǐ wú* 使無, *lit.* ‘let it be the case that X does not obtain’, as its paraphrase.

- (28) 微君姬氏，則臣狄人也。(*Zuǒzhuàn*, Xuān 2, 21: 366)

If it had not been for you belonging to the Jī clan, then I would be a barbarian.

- (29) 微召公虎，而絕無後嗣。(*Lǚshì Chūnqiū* 19/5: 1280)

If it had not been for Tiger, the Duke of Shào, [the Zhōu line] would have been cut off and without successors.

- (30) 微禹，吾其魚乎。(*Zuǒzhuàn*, Zhāo 1, 41: 701)

If it had not been for Yǔ, we would be fish, wouldn't we?

- (31) 見周昌，為跪謝曰：「微君，太子幾廢」。(*Shǐjì* 96: 2677)

Seeing Zhōu Chāng he knelt down to thank him, saying: ‘*If it had not been for You, my Lord, the prince would almost have perished.*’

- (32) 微趙君，幾為丞相所賣。(*Shǐjì* 87: 2561)

If it had not been for the Lord of Zhào, we would almost have been sold by the chancellor.

- (33) 微君之故，胡為乎中露……微君之躬，胡為乎泥中？(*Máoshī* 36, 2.2: 92)

If it were not for the lord's sake, how come we are out here in the dew (...) If it was not for the lord's person, how come we are out here in the mire?

- (34) 微吾子言焉，吾弗之聞也。(*Kǒngzǐ Jiāyǔ* 1/7: 12)

If it had not been for my master addressing this, I would have refused to hear of it.

- (35) 孔子曰：「微管仲，吾其被髮左衽矣。」見『論語·憲問』篇。使無管仲，不合諸侯，夷狄交侵，中國絕滅，此無管仲有所傷也。(*Lùnhéng* 18/55: 798)

Confucius said (19): ‘*If it had not been for Guǎn Zhòng, we would probably be wearing our hair unbound and button on the left*’. See the *Analects*, chapter ‘Xiànwèn’ [i.e. 14.17: 153]. If Guǎn Zhòng had not existed, the many

lords would not have become united, the Yí and the Dí would have crossed over to intrude, and the Central States would have become extinguished. This is the kind of calamity which would have happened if Guǎn Zhòng had not existed.

3.1.4 *Wēi* embedded in a concessive

A rare and quite peculiar usage of *wēi* produces a *figura etymologica*³⁵ with the preceding concessive conjunction *suī* 雖:

- (36) 雖微秦國，天下孰弗患。(Guóyǔ 4.24: 59)

Even if [it be the case that] it were not the state of Qín, who under heaven would not be upset about it?

- (37) 雖微楚國，諸侯莫不譽。(Guóyǔ 6.3: 100)

Even if [it be the case that] it had not been for the state of Chǔ, none among the many lords would not have eulogized.

While the counterfactual reading is preserved in cases such as (36)–(37), *wēi* seems to be reduced to a bare negative existential function (i.e., the function of *wú* 無 < *ma) in others:

- (38) 雖微先大夫有之，大夫命側，側敢不義。(Zuǒzhuàn, Chéng 16, 28: 108)

Even if [it be the case that] this had not existed among the former lords – if the lord orders my side, how would my side dare not to consider it just?!

3.1.5 *Wēi* with bleached negativity

This reduction of the negative copular function can be carried even further with late Warring States philosophical authors, where we occasionally come across examples in which *wēi* has lost its negative force completely, or where it is at least rescinded by subtle irony:

- (39) 柳下季曰：「今者闕然數日不見，車馬有行色，得微往見跖邪？」(Zhuāngzǐ 29: 1001)

Underwillow Jì said: ‘Now it seems as if I haven’t seen you around during the last couple of days and your carriage and horses look as if you went on a journey. I take it that you (*did-not-go* →) went off to see [Robber] Footpad, right?!’

³⁵ I.e., OC *s-tə-wuj.ma-tə-wuj; cf. the discussion of the word family on p. 74 below.

- (40) 葉公子高，**微**小短瘠，行若將不勝其衣然。(Xúnzǐ 5: 74)

The son of the lord of Yè is tall, but if he were (~~not~~ →) small and puny, his comportment would be such that he couldn't bear to cover it.

3.1.6 Wēi with propositional attitude predicates

Finally, *wēi* may occur in subordinate clauses which depend on a superordinate propositional attitude predicate such as 'to consider that', 'to seem' etc., very much reminiscent of the use of subjunctives in modern Romance languages or optatives in their Latin predecessor:

- (41) 然而以理義斲削，神農、黃帝，猶有可非，**微**獨舜、湯。
(Lǚshì Chūnqiū 19/1: 1233)

Even so, in terms of hewing the precise line of reason and justice, it seems that the Divine Husbandman and the Yellow Thearch could occasionally be faulted, *not* merely Shùn and Tāng.

- (42) 寧適不來，**微**我有咎。(Máoshī 9, 165.2: 328)

It would be better that they did/do not come, *rather than* my having fault.

On balance, then, *wēi* functions, with very few marginal exceptions, indeed overwhelmingly, as a marker of (negative) counterfactuality in conditionals and concessives throughout much of the pre- and early imperial period, and it even occurs dependent on superordinate propositional attitude predicates. Let us briefly consider the post-classical developments. As we have seen in (35), the CF marking usage is obsolescing during the early imperial period already. It is subsequently replaced – one might almost say “rewritten” – by an analytic construction, first occurring in the *Zuǒzhuàn*, in which the underlying negative copula of *wēi* resurfaces as *fēi* 非 in combination with one of the conditional conjunctions *zì* 自, *jù* 詎 or *ruò* 若 during the late classical and early medieval periods.³⁶ Consider for instance:

- (43) 唯聖人能外內無患。**自非**聖人，外寧必有內憂。
(Zuǒzhuàn, Chéng 16, 28: 106)

It is only the sage who is capable of being externally and internally without vexations. *If he were not* a sage, he would, even if externally at ease, be bound to have sorrows internally.

- (44) 且唯聖人能無外患又無內憂，**詎非**聖人，不有外，必有內憂……
(Guóyǔ 4.71: 78; cf. Bái 2004: 83)

³⁶ Occasionally, the conditional conjunction is dropped altogether, leaving *fēi* to introduce CF conditionals without any further markers. For examples see Unger (1997: 70f.).

Moreover it is only the sage who is capable of having no external vexations, as well as having no internal sorrows. *If he were not* a sage he would, even if he had no external [vexations], be bound to have internal sorrows ...

- (45) 自非通靈，莫之見聞，吾子必為無耳。(Bàopǔzǐ 6: 112)

If it had not been for communicating with the soul, no one would have seen or heard it, and my master would certainly have merely practiced inactivity!

- (46) 自非舊醫備覽明堂流注偃側縲者，安能曉之哉？(Bàopǔzǐ 15: 247)

If it had not been for the old doctor preparing himself by browsing through the annotations scattered along the diagrams lying sideways in Translucent Hall, how would he have been able to realize this?

- (47) 自非亭午夜分，不見曦月。(Shuǐjīng zhù, 8: 24)

“*If it were not* precisely for the distinction between noon and night, sunshine and moon would not be visible.”

- (48) 太子答言：「吾非神也。若非神者，從何國來，何所姓族？」
(Xiūxíng běnqǐjīng, T.3.184.468b; cf. Zēng 2004: 101)

The prince said: ‘I am not a spirit. *If I were* a spirit, from which country would I come, how would I stem from a clan and lineage?’

It would be interesting to know, whether this analytic construction had any effect upon the rise of the modern Chinese negative CFs of the *yào bù shì* 要不是 type since the Yuán period, all the more since Eifring (1988) has shown that in Modern Chinese the CF force of *fēi* 非 is still strongly felt! If so, the CF marking strategy in Chinese would have maintained a remarkably stable typological profile over time, despite the recurrent change of exponents. Since the functions covered by *wēi* 微 neatly correspond to the same semantico-pragmatic profile, which is characteristic of the use of non-event time in tense languages, we will try to delve a little deeper into its morphological prehistory, to see how it assumed this role in the first place.

3.2 The morphology of *wēi* 微 and its word family

It has been known at least since the work of Mulder (1949: 262f.) and Unger (1957) that *wēi*, although it shows no graphic relationship to *fēi* 非, functionally behaves as if it represents the non-indicative *m- counterpart of the noun phrase *p-negative.³⁷ Both negatives have become secondarily associated with *zhuī/wéi* 隹 (OBI 𪗇), the indexical representation of some kind of short-tailed bird, which

³⁷ On the distinction between *m- and *p-negatives see *inter alia* Pulleyblank (1978; 1995), Takashima (1988; 1996: 364–383), Gassmann/Behr (2005, III: 297–306, 436).

writes one of the archaic Chinese copulas, transcribed variously as *wéi* 惟~維~唯 in the edited texts.³⁸ The historical phonology of the underlying series has been worked out in a seminal paper by Jacques (2000) and is recaptured and systematized in the table below. For comparison, I add the more recent OC reconstructions by Zhèng-Zhāng (2003), which, however, fail to reflect the etymonic relationships of the involved phonophoric series:

	Mandarin	MC	OC	Early OC	OC
a.	隹 <i>zhūī</i>	< <i>*tsywij</i>	< <i>*tuj</i>	< <i>**tuj</i>	<i>*tul</i>
b.	惟維唯 <i>wéi</i>	< <i>*ywij</i>	< <i>*(tə-)wij</i>	< <i>**(tə-)wuj</i>	<i>*G^wil</i>
c.	唯 <i>wěi</i>	< <i>*ywijX</i>	< <i>*(tə-)wij-q</i>	< <i>**(tə-)wuj-q</i>	<i>*G^wil?</i>
d.	非 <i>fēi</i>	< <i>*pjij</i>	< <i>*puj</i>	< <i>**pə-tə-wuj</i>	<i>*puul</i>
e.	匪 <i>fěi</i>	< <i>*pjijX</i>	< <i>*puj-q</i>	< <i>**pə-tə-wuj-q</i>	<i>*puul?</i>
f.	誰 <i>shéi</i>	< <i>*dzywij</i>	< <i>*duj</i>	< <i>**m-tə-wuj</i>	<i>*djul</i>
g.	微 <i>wēi</i>	< <i>*mjij</i>	< <i>*muj</i>	< <i>**ma-t-wuj</i>	<i>*muul</i>
h.	雖 <i>suī</i>	< <i>*swij</i>	< <i>*s-tə-wij</i>	< <i>**s-tə-wuj</i>	<i>*sq^{hw}i(l)</i>
	CHARACTER	JACQUES			ZHÈNG-ZHĀNG

Looking at this word family from the perspective of the morphological model of Sagart (1999), and tentatively accepting OC **wuj* as the underlying root which denotes some kind of copula – what can be said about the role of the affixes? While it is tempting to construct a simple indicative *vs.* non-indicative dichotomy at first sight, co-extensive with the indicative (**pV-*) versus non-indicative/injunctive (**mV-*) negatives well attested elsewhere and paralleled by the prefix **m-* occurring in deontic and volitional verbs (cf. Sagart 1999: 81–84; Jīn Lǐxīn 2006: 241–249), it seems more plausible to identify the **ma-* in (g) with the existential negative *wú* 無 (OC **ma*). Another function of the **m-* prefix was to mark deverbal derivations, especially of agent nouns (Sagart 1999: 84f.; Jīn Lǐxīn 2006: 250–255). Viewed against this background, the interrogative *shéi* (f) would have emerged from a nominalization of the copula ‘who is it being X’ → ‘who’. Since the process of grammaticalization as an interrogative had not been fully accomplished

³⁸ It is likely, though by no means proven, that this word is a distant reflex of the Sino-Tibetan copula reconstructed as **way/*ray* by Matisoff (2003: 221f.). For the pros and cons of this theory, about which I prefer to remain non-committal for purposes of this paper, see Thurgood (1983), Matisoff (1985), Takashima (1996: 435–505) *vs.* Baxter (1992b) and Jacques (2000). *Huì* 惠 (**N-kk^w[i,ə]t-s* > MC **hwejH*), the functionally akin non-negatable extroverted OBI copula and focus marker, often cited along with *wéi* (cf., e.g., Zhāng 1988; Zhāng 2003) is clearly unrelated to it etymologically.

during the OC period, *shéi* questions – unlike those with *shú* 孰 < *dok (who) – are typically not modality-neutral, but emphatic with respect to the subject they refer to as a question, so that they commonly occur in rhetorical or questions otherwise marked for expressivity. Consider for instance:

- (49) 君若以德綏諸侯。誰敢不服？ (Zuǒzhuàn, Xǐ 4, 12: 203)

If my lord would appease the many lords through his charisma, *who* would dare not to obey?!

- (50) 子產曰：「人誰不死？」 (Zuǒzhuàn, Zhāo 2, 42: 720)

Zǐchǎn said: ‘Among human beings, *who* would not die?!’

- (51) 孔子曰：「為此詩者，其知道乎！能治其國家，誰敢侮之？」 (Mèngzǐ 3.3: 236)

Confucius said: ‘He who made this song, really knew the Dao! If one is able to keep one’s state and family in order, *who* would dare to despise this?!’

- (52)堯、舜不復生，將誰使定儒、墨之誠乎？ (Hánfēizǐ 19/55: 1080)

Since Yáo and Shùn are not going to be reborn, *who* then could be entrusted to judge the sincerity of the Confucians and Mohists?!

The prefix *t- has been shown by Sagart (1999: 92–94) to characterize ‘involuntary physical action’ verbs as well as stative verbs and a residual group of other non-transitives. While the first function is clearly too narrow to explain the use of this element in a copula, a stative or, more broadly, ‘de-transitive’ function for *-t(ə)- chimes nicely with the copulative usage, because stative verbs are neutral with respect to duration, termination or telicity. In language families with a fully grammaticalized stative ‘version’ or aspect morphology, such as Kartvelian or Semitic, the copula, if expressed by a verb, is usually marked for stativity. Moreover, it is typically stative predicates which occur in the protasis of a tense-marked counterfactual to provide the ‘open’ evaluation ground against which the consequent event is judged (Fleischman 1989; Plungian 2004; Han 2006). The *s- in (h), the concessive marker *suī*, is best explained as a causative prefix, which results in a complementizer reading ‘let it be [the case] that’. The suffix *-q in the *Máoshī* variant *fěi* 匪 (e) of the negative existential copula is unexplained and has been traditionally been interpreted as a dialect phenomenon. The situation is equally unclear as regards the reading *wěi* of 唯 < OC *(tə-)wuj-q in (c), for the adverb meaning ‘only, just’: if anything, one would have expected *-s rather than *-q as an adverb marker in this case!

3.3 Historical development of the non-indicative copula

In OBI, *wuj is used as an assertative modal auxiliary before verbs, as a negatable and schetically (i.e., tense-aspect-mood) markable equative copula with descriptive functions, i.e., attributing a property to the referential noun, or as a focalizing device before recipients, locatives and time phrases (Djamouri 2001; Zhāng Shūfēng 1988). Non-indicative usages slowly start to become more common in the bronzes, where the following types may be differentiated.

3.3.1 Dedicatory optative/adorative of the archaic copula

Wéi precedes a noun phrase, which is the subject of the main predication, expressing a wish, a request or dedication, e.g.,

- (53) 隹唯皇上帝 | 百神保余小子! (HU ZHONG 猷鐘; *Jíchéng* 1.260)

May the august God-on-high | and the many spirits protect me, the Little One!

- (54) 季戣乍作旅戣簋 | 隹唯子孫乍作寶。 (Jì X GUǐ 季戣戣; *Jíchéng* 6.3730)

Ji X had this mobile *guǐ* beaker made, | may sons and grandsons treat it as a treasure!

- (55) 弔叔趯父曰: 余考不克 | 御事。隹唯女汝災期其敬辭又 | 乃身, 毋毋) 尚為小子! (SHŪ²QUAN FŪ YŌU 弔趯父卣; *Jíchéng* 10.5428, 5429)

Shū²Quan fū said: 'I am so old that I am unable | to handle [my political] duties and affairs. May you, Yōu, reverently accomplish | your self, and not behave like a Youngster any more.'

If the focalized subject NP of the dedication does not appear, it is usually the vessel bearing the inscription which has to be supplied contextually, e.g.,

- (56) 隹唯 | 用獻于師尹朋朋友婚遘媾。 (SHÀNFŪ KÈ XŪ 膳夫克盥; *Jíchéng* 9.4465)

May [it, i.e., this vessel] | be used to make offerings to your colleagues in office, to the friendly [relatives] and the inlaws!

- (57) 白伯戣肇其乍作西 | 宮寶, 隹唯綏神 | 裒懷。 (BÓ DŌNG GUǐ 伯戣戣; *Jíchéng* 7.4115)

Elder Dong was the first to have | a treasure made for the Western palace. May [it, i.e., this treasured vessel] be used to maintain the | spiritual compassion!

Typically, these wishes are located in an unspecified time, i.e., *sub specie aeternitatis*, and *wéi* never occurs with this optative function in concrete wishes addressed to an interlocutor in a dialogue between humans.

3.3.2 The archaic copula after propositional attitude predicates

As in the case of *wēi* 微, the use of *wéi* sometimes seems to be dependent on a higher propositional attitude predicate in bronze inscriptions:

- (58) 公告𠄎厥事 | 于二上:隹唯民亡謀佹掘才哉顯, 彝恣味天 | 令命, 故亡, 允才哉! 隹唯苟敬德, | 亡𠄎攸違。(BĀN GUǐ 班毀; *Jíchéng* 8.4341)

[I, Bān,] the lord [of Máo] declare my deeds | to Your Highness: “Oh, that the people were clueless and exhausted, principally ignorant about the heaven’s | mandate and therefore perished – that is indeed obvious! [Only] If they were reverent and virtuous, | they would have been without something defying [it, heaven’s mandate].

The dominant usage of *wéi* in bronze inscriptions, however, is with date and location formulas of the type ‘隹 time X’, ‘隹 historic event Y’, ‘隹 location Z’ etc., usually occurring at the beginning of the inscription. Given the non-indicative semantics of the BI copula sketched above, it seems likely that what is expressed by these frames beyond mere temporal reference is a kind of narrative self-distancing, signalling citational or reportative ‘evidentiality’, i.e., non-self experience of the historical event. The precise evolution path leading from the OBI assertive copula to BI and OC non-indicative instances of this type remains to be clarified.

4 Conclusion

I have tried to show that Old Chinese had a reliable means of representing negative CF protases if it chose to do so, by using what is historically a negated non-indicative copula, surfacing as *wēi* 微, which functioned synchronically as a complementizer *vis-à-vis* the consequent clause. The core of this ‘direct’ contrary-to-fact marking typology stayed remarkably stable over time (cf. Eifring 1988), even if it was eventually replaced by analytic constructions of conjunction + *fēi* 非 or + *búshì* 不是. True to this ‘direct’ CF strategy, in which counterfactuality emerges by assertion rather than by implicature (Nevins 2001), protases were also signalled with the *m-deontic matrix verb *lìng* 令 < *mə-reŋ-s or the *s-causative matrix verb *shǐ* 使 (*s-rə-q) since the late classical period (Unger 1997: 66f.).³⁹ At the same time, a short-lived attempt to utilize a spatial rather than a ‘direct’ conditional marker may be observed, when *suǒ* 所 (place, location, position) is occasionally

³⁹ On the etymology of *shǐ* 使 and its word family see Takashima (1996: 411–417) and Behr (2004). One might even go so far as to reconstruct *shǐ* < *s-rə-q as causative zero grade of the ST copula *ray also preserved in Chinese *zài* 在 < *s-rə-q ‘be located at’ (*contra* Sòng Jīnlán 1998, who unconvincingly links *zài* to WT ‘dug’).

employed as a conjunction “provided that, in case” (cf. Unger 1997: 72f.) during the late classical period, which occasionally allows for CF interpretations as well:⁴⁰

- (59) 所不殺子者，有如陳宗。(Zuǒzhuàn, Āi 14, 59: 1032)

Provided that I did not kill you, may it apply to the lineage of Chén!

- (60) 所不掩子之惡，揚子之美者，使其身無終沒於越國。(Guóyǔ 8.9: 125)

Provided that you do not conceal your depravity and foster your goodness, let your body eternally be buried in the state of Yuè!

The phonophoric of *suǒ* 所 since the Shāng period is clearly *hù* 戶 < *gga-q (or *N-kka-q, doorleaf)⁴¹, which belongs to the word family of *jū* 居 < *kka (to live, dwell) and its *r-infix nominal counterpart *jiā* 家 < *kkra (family, home).⁴² The rare function of *suǒ* as a conjunction, which fell out of use immediately after the early imperial period, can be explained via the same spatial distancing metaphor, which we have seen operative in Tibetan and Burmese (cf. German *wofern* ‘provided that’), if one takes the particle usage of *suǒ* as an extension of its basic meaning (place, position etc.) as a noun.⁴³ Alternatively, one could also view this *suǒ* < *s-kra-q as a way of writing an explicit *s-causative of an underlying verb *jiǎ* 假 < *kkra-q (to be false, to borrow) in the sense of ‘to cause to be false’ → ‘to simulate’, which would then present yet another example of a ‘direct’, i.e., complementizer/causative, irrealis-marking strategy.⁴⁴

It has been speculated that the selection of ‘direct’ (assertive) CF marking devices is ultimately linked to the poverty of external morphology in languages such as Modern Chinese and Burmese (Nichols 2005). However, the same strategy is also encountered in Tlingit and other Eyak-Athabaskan languages, where morphology can by no means be considered particularly impoverished, and where a negative copula has been grammaticalized as an irrealis marker all the same (Leer

⁴⁰ Pace Unger, this usage is not entirely limited to oath-taking formulas in the two quoted texts and later anachronistic historiographical passages. It occurs, for instance, in the perfectly secular law texts from Shuìhǔdì 睡虎地. See for examples and a discussion Wèi (2000: 222).

⁴¹ Karlgren (1971: 91a–c) fails to acknowledge this.

⁴² Cf. *Jīngdiǎn shìwén* on *Yījīng* (37: 200) “人所居家也。”; *Shuōwén* (7B: 150) “家，居也。”.

⁴³ The *Shuōwén* gloss of *suǒ* as an onomatopoeic depicting the sound of lumbering, confirmed by *Shījīng* (13: 328) is certainly secondary. I do not see any necessity beyond the unproven Written Tibetan cognate *sa* ‘place’ to reassign the initial to the initial *s- (*xīn mǔ* 心母), rather than *sr-, as does Jīn (2006: 165). The function of *N-, a valency decreaser in verbs (cf. Gassmann/Behr 2005, III: 434f.) is unclear, yet there is, as far as I can see, no independent evidence for postulating *m- which could be explained as a *nomen agentis* (436).

⁴⁴ With an exact typological parallel in the form of *patz-be* (to deceive), developed into a counterexpectative and irrealis particle in Mocho Mayan, cf. Martin (1998: 204–207).

2000). Nor does the fact that a language uses ‘direct’ CFs necessarily imply that speakers of that language are unaware of the idea that an escape from linear into “fake” time may result in the characterisation of an event as unreal. Witness, for instance, the famous definition of the “hypothetical” as “what is not so *at present*” (*jiǎ yě, jīn bù rán yě* 假也，今不然也) in the logical chapters of the *Mòzǐ* (11.45: 379)!

Thus, it seems to me that Hockett’s sober precis (1954: 122) of the relationship between language and thought still stands after half a century. It held that the “most precisely definable differences between languages are also the most trivial from a Whorfian point of view” and that “languages differ not so much as to what *can* be said in them, but rather as to what it is *relatively easy* to say in them”. And, we might add, *relatively common* or *aesthetically pleasing* to say, and *consistent in illocutionary force*.

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